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ADDRESS
TO A HOUSEHOLD
ON THE
Death of One of its Members.

JANUARY 15TH, 1871.

BY
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MANY years ago, as will be remembered by a few only of those who hear me, I used to read a sermon or make an address, before evening prayers on Sundays. That was in the days when this parish was spiritually less favoured than it is now ; and I have long discontinued it, and do not intend as a rule to resume it, for the simple reason that I would rather encourage the family to go to church than to listen to me, and two sermons in the day are as much as it is suitable for ordinary hearers to attend.

But there may be particular occasions ; and it has been thought that one such may be on this day, when we have to lament the death of a young man of this household.

A sudden death it was not, either in the simple sense of those words, or, as we trust, in that more important sense in which we pray that it may not be ours, an unprepared death. A rapid death it was, more so than is usual in youth ; so much so that from the time he was seriously ill I was myself advised not to see him, and did not see him before he died ; an omission which is to me a matter of much concern.

We ought not to destroy the natural feeling that death in youth has a peculiar sadness, nor suppose that the ancient promise of a long life

has ceased to bear its simple meaning, or that such a life is not in itself a special blessing. Yet let us not forget the other side. Even the Heathen had a mysterious proverb, that they whom the Gods loved, died young; even the Jew could say, that in death the righteous is taken away from evil, and shall enter into peace; and for the Christian it should be a mere commonplace that for such a one to depart is to be with Christ, and to die is gain.

And such we trust was this young man. He came from a neighbourhood connected with us here by manifold and increasing ties, and we had better opportunities than usual of knowing about him. And we believe that not only had he the common virtues, easily and too exclusively appreciated even by the worldly, honesty, temperance, diligence, gentleness. He had the more important blessing of pious parents, and a Christian home, and consequently that treasure beyond price, a religious training in childhood, which let no parent ever abandon, whatever public measures about schools may be passed, whatever encouragement—good and right in itself—may be given to the learning and scholarship of this world.

That training, we believe, had its fruit in a Christian life. Here, as it can be nowhere else—here, as in so many millions of cases, let comfort be sought and found by those whom he has left.

And if, before concluding, I add a few words of a somewhat different bearing, my object is not blame of the dead, but warning to the living.

When he came to us, we heard of him that which we are thankful to say is in this country almost, I do not say quite, a sure sign of some measure at least of religious earnestness ; that he was a regular Communicant. Now, I do not say that he altogether ceased from that habit. Again, I wholly repudiate what I look on as unwarranted and uncharitable, the attempt to measure religious sincerity by any given amount of attendance at Holy Communion. But the extreme case of *very* rare attendance, especially when that is a change from a more frequent habit, can surely not be looked on without serious misgiving.

If such was at all the case with this young man, let us reflect if it may not be in some measure accounted for. I learn that on his death-bed the subject was mentioned to him, and he spoke some such simple words as these : "It is happier along with others." Truly it is so, as being the greatest act of communion, not only with God, but with man.

And I fear those words truly pointed to what we cannot but observe with pain, if it be so : and for myself I cannot doubt that the attendance at Holy Communion among this household is on the

whole less than it used to be,—less than was good in the way of example to a new-comer among us.

It is not what I like to interfere with, or would mention except on a special occasion ; for fear any should be induced to communicate from that worse than worthless motive in such a matter, the desire to please me, or to please any one—or any motive whatever but an humble and loving obedience to the words of their dying Saviour. But I do not believe there has been any sufficient cause for such a falling off. Nothing should keep any one from Communion but wilful sin. The wilful and conscious sinner certainly should not come ; though, to speak plainly, it matters very little, as long as he is so, whether he comes or not. And this much I will venture with some confidence to say, (and I am looking back with personal knowledge over about forty years), that from many at least of the more serious forms of sin and vice—forms too common in large establishments—this household has ever been very nearly, perhaps altogether free.

As I believe, it is but an instance of that deep-rooted error among many classes of English society, that the universal ordinance of the Lord's Supper is not, and was not meant to be, universal among Christians—that it was meant for certain classes, or conditions of life, or age, or advancements in holiness. I have known a sharp sorrow

bring permanently to the Holy Table, some who before were much less there—surely a blessed result in itself, but unreasonable if that were the only ground. We are to communicate not because we are in grief, or in leisure, or in sickness, or in old age, or in danger, or because we see, or do not see, certain perceptible effects from the ordinance or its absence in others—but because of the words of Christ. What were those words? “Drink ye *all* of this.” What was the teaching of the Apostle? “We are *all* partakers of that one Bread.” What was the practice of the early Christians? “*All* continuing with one accord, brake bread from house to house.”

Of the excuses commonly made, as I should guess, chiefly one may apply to us here. It is probable that many may stay away because they have so much to do. It must be said of this, as of the rest, that a stranger delusion never prevailed among men. It is the precise reverse of the truth. It is precisely *because* we have so much to do; *because* we are bound by our plainest duty to give so much time to absorbing occupations—to things of earth which are good and right in themselves, but will not continue so unless sanctified by the “continual dew” of God’s grace—*because* we have so little time in the week, that we should value and frequent those ordinances of the Lord’s Day, which above other things convey

to us that grace. The Holy Communion is for all but the wilful sinner; for the laborious, the unlearned, the slow, the struggling, the ever-tempted, the often-falling Christian, no less than for the highest saint. But reason and argument have, in such matters, but little force against custom and prejudice. An accidental or inferior motive may sometimes be of use, and prepare the way for better things, when the proper motive fails. And if it should be the case, that the absence of example on the part of any here should have slackened the course of piety in one who was to be called from us in the morning of life, it may perhaps touch their hearts, and lead them to consider their ways.

But, as I said, I would speak, not of the dead, but of the living. Of the departed, I would conclude in no words but those of comfort and hope. May it be no unfounded trust, that he is gone from a life begun and meant to be continued in human service, to that directly heavenly service, which is even here, in rudiment and promise, what it will hereafter be in fulfilment, “perfect freedom;” and that, as we are told in one of those texts which are surely precious in proportion to their fewness, that men hereafter shall be “as the angels,” he too may find a place among those “ministering spirits sent forth to minister to those who shall be heirs of salvation.”







